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SUBJECT: ARAB-TUAREG TENSIONS IN LERE RISE AFTER SECURITY
FORCES FIRE ON CROWD

Classified By: Political Officer Aaron Sampson, Embassy Bamako, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1.(C) Summary: On November 10 security forces in Lere dispersed a demonstration with live bullets, killing one civilian and wounded 6 others. Lere is south-west of Timbuktu, near the Malian border with Mauritania. An official commission of inquiry led by the Gendarmerie arrived in Lere on November 18. On November 19 a member of President Amadou Toumani Toure's entourage who was sent to Lere following the incident told the Embassy that security forces fired in self-defense when the crowd, having ransacked City Hall, turned toward members of the Malian national guard. Many of the wounded, however, were reportedly shot in the back. Reasons for the riot differ, with some claiming local residents were angered by the mayor's decision regarding a new contract for local water service delivery, and others citing increased tensions between Lere's ethnic Tuareg and Arab communities in advance of the May/June 2009 municipal elections. The same Malian official said arms and drug traffickers seeking to avoid more active Mauritanian patrols since Mauritania's August coup are relocating to Lere just inside the Malian border. End Summary.

2.(U) One civilian, Karim Sidibe, was killed and 6 others wounded on November 10 when national guard troops fired on a crowd of demonstrators in the town of Lere, between Timbuktu and Mali's border with Mauritania. The crowd was apparently in the process of ransacking Lere's City Hall when shots were fired. Among the wounded was Lere's former Mayor, Bouya Dicko, who was evacuated first to Timbuktu and then to Bamako for treatment. Following the incident the director of the health clinic in Lere, Ousmane Diallo, told Agence France Press that several of the wounded were shot in the back, indicating they were in the process of fleeing security forces. Witnesses reported that some members of the crowd were carrying antiquated hunting rifles and may have fired on security forces. There were no reports of injured national guard members. The Gendarmerie is investigating the incident and an official commission of inquiry arrived in Lere on November 18.

3.(U) Two explanations for the crowds' behavior prior to the shooting have emerged. According to some sources, Lere residents were angered by the current Mayor's decision to award a contract for the town's water service delivery to a particular individual. A second version attributes the unrest to tensions between Lere's ethnic Arab and Tuareg communities, which are each positioning themselves for municipal elections scheduled for mid-2009.

4.(C) On November 19 presidential insider and Ministry of Territorial Administration official Kader Bah told the Embassy that members of the national guard in Lere had fired in self-defense. President Toure and Minister of Territorial

Administration Kafougouna Kone sent Bah to Lere shortly after the incident in an attempt to calm local tensions. Bah confirmed that residents were angered by the Mayor's water privatization scheme, but attributed the violence to tensions between Berabiche Arabs and Tuaregs. Bah said that Mali has seen an substantial up-tick in trafficking activity around Lere since the Mauritanian coup in August, and believes traffickers who previously took refuge in Mauritania are relocating to Lere. Bah said most of the traffickers had ties to Berabiche Arabs based in the region of Timbuktu.

5.(C) Following the shooting, Oumarou ag Mohamed Ibrahim Haidara, president of Mali's second house of parliament, reportedly called President Toure to complain that ethnic Arabs were taking over the town of Lere in advance of the 2009 municipal elections. Haidara is a Tuareg from Timbuktu.

According to Bah, former Minister Mohamed ag Erlaf, a prominent Tuareg from Kidal who is now Director of the Malian Agency for Local Investment, also called President Toure to register the same complaint. Meanwhile, Minister of Culture Mohamed el Moctar, an Arab from the region of Gao, called President Toure with the reverse observation, claiming that Tuaregs were impinging on Lere's community of ethnic Arabs.

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